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ABSTRACT

During the summer and fall orientation of 1972, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council on Education was administered to incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina (USC) and 527 other institutions of higher education. The resulting summary data on entering freshmen included information on the entering freshmen at USC and weighted normative data based on questionnaire results from the 42 participating universities. The report focuses on five controversial issues: legalization of marijuana, increased earning power resulting from a college education, the role of the Federal government in protecting the consumer, abolishment of capital punishment, and equal salary and opportunity rights for men and women. The first part of the report compares USC student responses to the national university norms. The second section compares the responses of USC males and females. Conclusions are indicated. (Author/MJM)

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Division of Student Affairs

Subject: Comparison of Freshmen Attitudes on
Controversial Issues

Research Notes No. 13-73

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Research Notes
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SUBJECT: Comparison on Freshmen Attitudes on Controversial Issues

Nature and Scope of Study:

During the summer and fall orientation of 1972, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council on Education was administered to the incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina and 527 other institutions of higher education, including two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities. The resulting summary data on entering freshmen included information on the entering freshmen at the University of South Carolina and weighted normative data based on questionnaire results from the forty-two participating universities. Similar data were also available for the freshmen classes of 1968 through 1971.

The following is one in a series of reports drawn from analysis of these data. This report focuses on the item in the questionnaire in which the student was asked to indicate his agreement on several controversial issues. The issues examined are the students' agreement with the following statements: (1) Marijuana should be legalised, (2) The chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earning power, (3) The Federal Government should be more involved in the protection of the consumer from faulty goods and services, (4) Capital punishment (the death penalty) should be abolished, and (5) Women should receive the same salary and opportunities for advancement as men in comparable positions.

The first part of the report compares the responses of USC freshmen and the national university norms on the five controversial issues identified above. Next, the responses for USC males and females are compared. The report concludes by summarizing the chief findings of these questionnaire responses.

Table I: A Comparison of Attitudes on Selected Controversial Issues for USC Freshmen and National University Norms (1968-1972)

Agree that	USC					National				
	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Legalize Marijuana	16.4	20.8	38.9	42.2	53.8	22.3	28.8	45.8	45.5	51.5
Monetary Benefit of College	52.9	56.3	64.2	57.0	52.1	52.1	47.3	57.8	50.5	50.7
Federal Govt. Not Protecting Consumer	*	75.4	68.8	75.8	76.1	*	72.0	67.2	78.8	77.0
Abolish Capital Punishment	*	54.2	57.0	58.6	*	*	56.2	61.0	61.1	*
Equality for Women	*	*	82.0	89.5	92.0	*	*	84.5	91.1	93.5

*Data not obtained this particular year

Table I Comments:

1. In most cases, the attitude changes of USC freshmen were in the same direction as their counterparts in the national university sample.
2. The greatest change in freshmen attitudes concerned the legalization of marijuana. Since its inclusion in the questionnaire in 1968, the percentage of agreement has risen rapidly both nationally and at U.S.C.
3. During 1968 and 1969 the percentage of USC freshmen who agreed with the legalization of marijuana was significantly less than the national norm. Since 1969 the percentage of freshmen who agree with the legalization of marijuana has risen more rapidly for USC freshmen than for the national norm. In 1972, the percentage of USC freshmen in agreement exceeded the national norm by 2.3%.
4. The question about the primary benefit of college being monetary showed a rather unusual pattern. For entering USC freshmen the trend for two years was to agree less with the question than they did the previous year. For 1970, the amount of agreement increased about 8 percentage points over 1969. The same increase was true of the national sample. 1971 and 1972 saw agreement decrease for USC students and national norm.

Table II. A Comparison of Attitudes on Selected Controversial Issues for USC Freshman Males and Freshman Females (1968-1972)

Agree that	Males					Females				
	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Legalize Marijuana	19.6	22.9	40.5	44.4	56.5	11.6	17.5	36.8	39.3	50.2
Monetary Benefit of College	71.3	62.6	70.1	64.4	57.6	50.9	46.8	56.7	47.8	44.8
Federal Govt. Not Protecting Consumer	*	76.5	69.5	71.1	75.6	*	73.7	68.2	76.1	76.8
Abolish Capital Punishment	*	50.1	52.6	53.8	*	*	60.5	63.1	64.8	*
Equality for Women	*	*	77.5	85.3	89.1	*	*	87.7	94.8	95.8

*Data not obtained this particular year

Table II Comments:

1. The percentage of USC males in favor of the legalization of marijuana has remained greater than the percentage of USC females in agreement for all of the years surveyed. Female attitudes toward legalization of marijuana increased at a slightly greater rate than the males at USC from 1968 through 1970. In 1971 and 1972, the rate of increase in agreement shifted, showing agreement for males increasing at a more rapid rate.
2. Concerning the monetary benefit of college, the male and female figures have moved in the same direction each year. The females still tend to agree less. Of all the issues examined, the greatest difference between male and female attitudes existed with regard to the monetary benefit of college.
3. Both male and female freshmen followed the same direction each year toward Federal involvement in consumer protection. The percentages are very close for the two groups.
4. Both male and female agreement with the abolition of capital punishment has risen over the three year period reported, with females showing a consistently greater agreement.
5. Percentage of male agreement with "Equality for Women" has increased at a greater rate than has the female agreement although the percentage of females in agreement has remained greater.

CONCLUSION:

1. The percentage of USC student agreement on selected controversial issues in 1972 conforms closely to the national university norms.
2. Over the period studied, the gap between USC freshmen and national freshmen has remained about the same. The exception concerns the legalization of marijuana. Although the percentage of both USC and national freshmen in agreement with the legalization of marijuana consistently increased, the USC percentage of agreement has increased at a greater rate, and the percentage of agreement on the part of USC freshmen exceeded that of the national norm in 1972.
3. The attitude differences between USC males and females seems to be decreasing. In most cases, the females are moving toward the male attitudes. In general, the USC male attitudes are a little more liberal than the female attitudes.
4. Judging by the information now available, it appears that the freshmen entering USC have increasingly more liberal attitudes toward certain controversial issues. It also appears that the students entering USC are very similar in their attitudes to other entering freshmen across the nation.